

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /057 W

----- 084343

R 121530Z MAY 76

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3428

INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

MAEMBASSY JIDDA 3498

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, EG

SUBJECT: PRESSURE FROM THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

1. THERE IS A NEW CONSERVATIVE GROUND SWELL IN EGYPT WHICH IS CRYSTALIZING AROUND A MOVE TO ISLAMIZE THE JURIDICIAL STRUCTURE OF EGYPT. ONE COPTIC ASSEMBLY MEMBER HAS ASSURED US THAT AT LEAST ONE BILL HAS BEEN INTRODUCED IN MANY PAST ASSEMBLY SESSIONS ADVOCATING CERTAIN TRADITIONAL ASPECTS OF ISLAMIC LAW, THESE BILLS HAVE ALWAYS DIED ON THE VINE IN COMMITTEE. THIS YEAR, HOWEVER, A SWEEPING DRAFT LAW WILL BE DEBATED BY ASSEMBLY, PROBABLY IN NEXT FEW DAYS.

2. IN RECENT MONTHS, GOE HAS DELIBERATELY SOUGHT TO USE THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT TO COMBAT LEFTIST POLITICAL VIEWS (CAIRO 4727), PARTICULARLY ON CAMPUSES. AT SAME TIME, GOE LEADERS HAVE NATURALLY SOUGHT DELICATELY TO CONTROL MUSLIM ENTHUSIASM. SPEAKER MAR'I, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS DISPATCHED MORE THAN ONCE TO URGE AZHAR SHAIKHS TO RESTRAIN THEIR RHETORIC. JUDGING FROM CAMPUS QUIESCENCE, POLICY MAY HAVE WORKED IN UNIVERSITIES, BUT RESULTANT INCREASE IN SELF-CONFIDENCE ON PART OF EXTREME REIGHTISTS IS PRICE GOE IS NOW PAYING.

3. LAST FRIDAY, FOR FIRST TIME, SOME ALEXANDRIA UNIVERSITY

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STUDENTS TOOK GRADUATION OATH IN A MOSQUE. MAR'I HIMSELF

ATTENDED AND TO SURPRISE OF MANY ANNOUNCED THAT THE PEOPLES ASSEMBLY IS IN PROCESS OF ADOPTING "POSITIVE STAND" TOWARD APPLICATION ISLAMIC LAW AND WILL BEGIN STUDY DRAFT LAWS ON "GOD'S RESTRICTIONS", INCLUDING FORBIDDING OF LIQUOR, USURY, AND BREAKING OF RAMADAN FAST IN PUBLIC. PEOPLES ASSEMBLY DEPTUY SPEAKER CONFIRMED IN PUBLIC STATEMENT THAT ASSEMBLY WILL DISCUSS BILL PROHIBITING LIQUOR AND NEW MINJUSTICE HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN ASKED (PRESUMABLY BY ASSEMBLY MEMBERS) TO EXPEDITE DRAFTING OF NEW LAW ON THEFT, RAPE, AND EMBEZZLEMENT. MINJUSTICE IS QUOTED AS SAYING PROHIBITION ON LIQUOR AND STIPULATION THAT THIEVES WILL LOSE A HAND WOULD BE APPLIED ONLY TO MUSLIMS AND NOT CHRISTIANS. SHAIKH AL-AZHAR, IN AN AHARAM INTERVIEW MAY 7, CONFIRMED THAT AZHAR COMMITTEES HAVE COMPLETED STUDIES ON REVISION OF CIVIL LAW AND HAVE ALMOST COMPLETED DRAFTING OF NEW CRIMINAL LAW. TONE OF INTERVIEW WAS STERN: "THEFTS WILL END AS SOON AS PEOPLE SEE ONE OR TWO HANDS CUT OFF."

4. COMMENT: IN EMBASSY'S VIEW, THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY THAT STRICT ISLAMIC LEGISLATION WILL BE PASSED IN PRESENT SESSION. NEVERTHELESS, THAT MAR'I HIMSELF JUDGES IT POLITIC TO MAKE SPECIAL GESTURES TO CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM OPINION IS INDICATIVE OF THE PANDORA'S BOX WHICH GOE HAS OPENED BY WOOING THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MOSLEMS, LAW
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 MAY 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976CAIRO06541
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760184-0058
From: CAIRO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760564/aaaacctx.tel
Line Count: 85
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 JUN 2004 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <04 OCT 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESSURE FROM THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT
TAGS: PINT, EG
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006